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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - October 6, 2005

¶11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk over the past week.

Human Rights

¶12. Fines, Fines and More Fines

On September 30, a Belarusian court ordered the nation wide independent weekly newspaper BDG Delovaya Gazeta to pay BYR 50 million [USD 23,250] to a former riot police officer for "moral loss" in a libel case. The journalist that wrote the story has to pay the claimant an additional BYR 5 million [USD 2,325]. Separately, on October 3, a court fined the editors of the private independent newspaper Zhoda BYR 2.5 million [USD 1,300] for pasting pictures of prominent political figures in classical paintings in their publication.

¶13. Stricter Travel Regulations

On October 5, President Lukashenko introduced a decree that further limits the ability of students to travel abroad. Now only elementary students who are accompanied by a teacher can travel to the U.S. for a period of more than 15 days. The decree also mandates that several GOB ministries, including the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, must be informed immediately if any student has not come back to Belarus within 24 hours of their scheduled return date.

¶14. Travel Stamps Required to Go Abroad

On October 4, the Belarusian Constitutional Court ruled the Soviet-era foreign-travel permit system will remain intact indefinitely, despite complaints from citizens that the system infringes on their constitutional right to travel freely. As it stands now, Belarusians have to*QQQQpJUQat it is the duty of the Ministry to "ensure that the educational process is not politicized." This statement followed from the GOB May directive ordering educational institutions to investigate and possibly expel students who participate in unauthorized political opposition demonstrations and punish them with expulsion. The Minister does not consider this directive an infringement on the students' constitutional rights.

¶16. Deutsche Welle Is On The Air

On October 3, Deutsche Welle - the winner of the European Commission's one-year radio contract - started broadcasting its 15-minute analytical radio program entitled "Belarusian Chronicles" three times an evening Monday through Friday. Deutsche Welle noted that the program is not a mouthpiece for the opposition to advocate the overthrow of Lukashenko; instead, it is

intended to provide information to free-thinking Belarusians and to fill-in the information gap resulting from the closure of independent newspapers.

¶7. Police Detain Youth Activist for Leaflet Distribution

On October 3, the police detained 19 year-old activist and member of the environmental group "For a Clean Barysaw!" Andrey Malasay for distributing the Euronews TV channel program listings. The police confiscated 330 leaflets from Malasay and brought him to the station where he was fingerprinted and videotaped while offering testimony.

¶8. No KGB Harassment Here

On October 3, a GOB prosecutor dismissed a complaint from a local NGO accusing the Committee for State Security (KGB) of harassing a free-lance journalist. The journalist had traveled to Prague with a delegation to familiarize itself with local self-government agencies. Upon his return from the Czech Republic, the KGB summoned the journalist to their offices and questioned him about the details and purpose of his trip. Citing the constitutional right to travel, the NGO considered the interrogation of the journalist to be

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harassment.

Civil Society

¶9. Another Explosion in Vitebsk

On October 4, another explosion occurred in the Vitebsk region near the border with Russia. There were no reported casualties. GOB authorities stressed that this incident - like the explosion in September - was an act of hooliganism, not terrorism.

¶10. Lukashenko Is a Shoo-in for 2006 Election

On October 3 at the opening session of parliament, House Speaker Vladimir Konoplyov expressed his confidence that "Lukashenko will take next year's election by a landslide margin," since the President enjoys huge support from both the urban and rural populace. Konoplyov used this opportunity to bash opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, stating that his nomination was a directive from the West.

¶11. Paranoia About Supposed Propaganda War

On October 1, Lukashenko informed his Security Council that the West is waging a propaganda war on Belarus in order to facilitate regime change. Lashing out at Poland and the Baltics for hosting NATO sponsored foreign broadcasts, Lukashenko stressed that Belarus must protect its citizens "from foreign information onslaught and from instability sown by the anti-Belarusian information sources."

Economics

¶12. The GOB Acquires Private Company Kovry Bresta

On October 5, the GOB agreed to assume the BYR 15.7 billion [USD 7.3 million] debt of Kovry Bresta OJSC (Brest Carpets) and thereby increased the percentage of government ownership in the company from 0.003% to 99.73%. [Note: The government take over of Kovry Bresta is the latest in a trend by the GOB to nationalize private companies.]

Bilateral Relations

¶13. Trouble Crossing the Polish-Belarusian Border

On October 2, Belarusian customs officials prevented two Polish parliamentarians from entering Belarus to attend the opposition congress because of problems with the vehicle's registration. [Note: The car was registered in the wife of the driver's name, but not the driver's name]. On October 5, Polish authorities prevented former Union of Belarusian Poles (UBP) leader Tadeusz Kruczowski from entering Poland, citing that he presented a threat to the country's security. The GOB had supported Kruczowski during the leadership dispute in the UBP.

Anti-U.S.

¶14. U.S. Embassy Conscripts Belarusians to Fight in Iraq, State Media Reports

On October 4, Belarusian television evening program "Panorama" accused the U.S. Embassy in Minsk of recruiting Belarusians to fight for the U.S. in Iraq. In an interview with the station, an unnamed former U.S. Embassy employee said that Embassy Minsk offered the Belarusians USD 2,500-3,500 salary per month and expedited immigration to the U.S. in exchange for service in Iraq. Panorama journalists stated that the U.S. wants to enlist Belarusians in order to "plug holes in the anti-Iraq coalition with cannon fodder bought for a song in Belarus."

Quote of the Week

¶15. On October 1 in a message to his Security Council,

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Belarusian President Lukashenko described Western efforts to enclose Belarus in a "circle of misinformation":

"The West and the opposition are trying to unleash an ethnic and religious war in Belarus....We should keep in mind that all hostilities initiated by the U.S. over the past decade started from information interventions. Mass propaganda campaigns directed against a certain country were eventually followed by military attacks."

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